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ABSTRACT

The teaching activities presented in this pamphlet focus on school libraries. The pamphlet begins with a description of the role of the school library. It then discusses the library as a resource center, the kinds of resources contained there (both print and nonprint materials), the function of the teacher-librarian, scheduling library activities, library and research skills, ways to develop a life-long love of books and reading, and establishing a classroom library. (EL)

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SCHOOL LIBRARIES

Look them up!

Check them out!

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Why libraries?

ONCE UPON A TIME A TEACHER was supposed to be a fountain of knowledge, a sole repository of information, like Oliver Goldsmith's *Village Schoolmaster,* who was a constant source of amazement to the gazing rustics ranged around:

And still they gazed, and still their wonder grew,
That one small head could carry all he knew.

Schooling was then seen as a matter of transferring information from such a teacher's head, (small or otherwise), into the (even smaller) heads of the pupils. This was schooling of the "empty bucket" variety. The pupils' heads were considered to be empty vessels, to be filled from above by turning on a tap (of knowledge) until full to capacity.

As the focus of school gradually shifted from the fountainhead to the vessel — from teachers **teaching** to children **learning** — it became obvious that children needed access to more than one source of knowledge. Books, for instance, became alternative, or supplementary, sources of information — with certain in-built advantages. In turn, the availability and use of film strips, 16 mm films and radio introduced exciting new possibilities, all of which served to demonstrate the limits of single-source education.

In more recent decades, with the introduction of such ideas as personalised and individualised learning, independent and small-group inquiry learning, self-tutoring, open-plan classrooms etc. the need for a variety and wealth of educational resources has become even more obvious. Such practices cannot work without them.

The growth of knowledge, and the need to apply it, places emphasis on the abilities to **discover** and to **retrieve** information, to **organise,** to **apply** and **evaluate** information, and to **communicate,** rather than simply the ability to memorise.

The shift in educational focus away from teaching children *what* to think, to helping them learn *how* to think, has made the provision of educational resources in schools a major priority. Fortunately, this shift and this need have coincided with an availability "explosion" of such resources of all kinds.

The notion of one teacher, as a sole educational source, attempting to teach a whole roomful of children as though they were one, was a severely limited, limiting and unjust one. We are now aware that "knowledge" is no longer the fixed, finite parcel of "facts" it might have been thought to be in the Village Schoolmaster's day.

In our focus on children, we have come to see things which would not have been apparent to the Village Schoolmaster. We now acknowledge that all children are different. We see that the combination of interests, abilities, background and needs is different for every single child. We also now accept that children learn in different ways, at different speeds and to differing degrees — and they are not the same every day, either!

It follows, then, that if each child is to learn in his/her own *ways* and *time* best suited to his/her abilities, then schools must make provision for such differences. Since no one teacher can cater for, and satisfy, the requirements of every single child, it follows that a range of alternative resources for learning must be made available. Books and print materials are just the start.

Once a school *has* acquired the necessary wealth of educational materials, it becomes obvious that, if these resources are to be made available to *everybody* in that community, they must be organised. The only way to do this is to house the resources centrally in a systematic way and to make them so accessible that they flow constantly throughout the school in efficient ways.

The best way to do this is through placing the acquisition and organisation of such resources in the hands of a qualified expert — an experienced teacher who is also especially trained to do this. We call such a person a ***Teacher Librarian*** and the collection of resources a ***Library*** (or Resource Centre).

But the School Library is also a notional thing. Physically, it may be as different as children are. However, whether it is an elaborate, architect-designed building, an especially designated and set-up room, a part of a corridor or merely a corner of a classroom, its aim will be the same — to support, in as full and enriching ways as possible, the educational needs of every member of the school community and, in the broadest sense, its whole curriculum.

The role of the school library is, thus, to help the school achieve its aims.

The library as resource centre

IDEALLY, THE LIBRARY IS THE heart of the school, physically as well as metaphorically speaking. It is its vital, central core. Here, all of the many educational resources of a school are acquired, organised and housed, in attractive, comfortable, efficient and systematic ways and publicised and made available as simply, freely and flexibly as possible.

As a centralised educational resource centre, with potential access to all kinds of other resource centres (public libraries, data banks etc.) through the availability of resource sharing and information networks, a school library aims to cater for different levels of interests and abilities over every aspect of a school's curriculum.

A good library is just as much a **function** as a place. In fact, to evaluate how good a school library is, an outside observer wouldn't need to go near the library space at all. Its influence should be apparent everywhere in the school — especially in the classrooms.

A library should not just be a service, an adjunct. It should play a central, dynamic part in the educational life of the whole school. Its influence should **permeate** the school.

What resources does it contain?

(a) Print materials

The school library/resource centre contains, of course, **books** — *fiction, non-fiction, picture-story books* and *standard reference books* such as *dictionaries, atlases* and *encyclopaedias.* Like all other resources, these are classified and housed in systematic ways for ease of access and location.

The school library contains other types of print materials, such as *newspapers, magazines, pictures, cuttings* and *pamphlets* (vertical file).

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(b) Non-print materials

Slides, pictures, film-strips, movie films, videotapes, sound recordings (disc and cassette), *microfiche,* computer *data banks, games, overhead transparencies* etc, are examples of alternative "carriers of information".

These items of "software", unlike books, require "hardware" to store and/ "retrieve" their contents. The library, therefore, also houses *slide-viewers, projectors* and *screens, tape recorders, phonographs, overhead projectors, video machines, photocopiers, computers, printers* etc.

Libraries also contain *maps, charts, posters, art prints, models* (e.g. human body; eye), *toys, games,* teaching/learning *kits* and a variety of *"realia"*, e.g. actual samples of coal, wheat, fossils, shells etc.

Every aspect of the school curriculum may be supported through a library's resources. However, since it aims to cater for *individual* needs and interests, it aims to match **recreational** needs too.

And as well as organising all these resources, the library offers instruction on how to locate and use them to best advantage, through its own educational program, at all levels.

It is all a far cry from Goldsmith's Village Schoolmaster!

The teacher-librarian

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE library in the overall educational life of the school depends on the amount and quality of liaison, communication, commitment and support existing between school administration and staff and the teacher-librarian.

To get the most from your library, involve the teacher-librarian in your advance planning of educational programs. This will ensure that the most appropriate resources are made available to you and your class. Furthermore, the teacher-librarian may be able to offer valuable suggestions on *optimum resource use* and *appropriate activities.* A qualified teacher-librarian is not only a **media expert** but a knowledgeable **curriculum consultant** too.

Make sure, co-operatively, that time spent by children in the library is wisely spent. All "research" should have a clear purpose. Discuss all such sessions with your librarian to ensure that maximum benefit is gained.

And remember that liaison is a two-way affair. Your presence and co-operation in the library is appreciated, but remember to invite your librarian into *your* classroom too, to:

- share in classroom activities
- check and advise on best use of library resources in the classroom
- discover your needs
- assist in resource-based teaching/learning and evaluation
- participate in team-teaching activities
- introduce books to children (librarians have been practising "shared book experience", at all levels, for decades!)

Make sure your teacher librarian is represented in all curriculum planning and educational policy making in your school. (And don't forget social committees too!)

Remember your librarian IS a **teacher** and will appreciate being treated as such — as a member of the school teaching team of educational professionals.

Your school librarian possibly knows more about individual children than anyone else on the staff. Instead of teaching a child for one year only, the librarian has close contact (sometimes daily) with that child as he/she progresses throughout the grades, year by year. The librarian, for instance, often knows a great deal about a particular child's reading interests and abilities through having watched, nurtured and catered for them on hundreds of occasions. The continuity of such knowledge may be invaluable to a classroom teacher.

An interesting sidelight is the fact that, in Years K-6/7 at least, children often and freely confide in school librarians, whom they see as being friendly, non-threatening and positive (they don't normally set tests, write reports, correct homework, interview parents). As a result of this special (but unsolicited) relationship, librarians often know a good deal about a child's background, interests, apprehensions etc. about which a classroom teacher is perhaps unaware. Without, of course, breaching confidentiality, by conferring with librarians about special cases, classroom teachers may reach a greater understanding of children in their care.

☐publicity for film, and television tie-ins
☐organising displays to publicise particular books, authors, genres (e.g. fantasy, humour), events (e.g. Children's Book Week)
☐arranging author/illustrator visits to the school.

The classroom teacher should make the most of the librarian's knowledge of children's literature. Ask for best books for you to take home and read. The librarian ought to be able to suggest books which match your interests and tastes — just as he/she does for children! It's all a matter of knowing both the books *and* the clients!

- Ask the librarian which books are most suitable for **serial-reading** in your classroom. Some, with self-contained chapters, are better than others. (Make sure you read the book first yourself, however. Teachers who "serial read" an unfamiliar book "cold" often wonder why it fails to generate heat!)
- Watch the librarian **introducing books** to classes, to pick up titles, ideas — and enthusiasm!
- **Bulk-borrow** for your classroom library regularly — and keep the books circulating. Your classroom should be "flooded" with literature — fiction, picture books, poetry etc.
- Have a **morning book talk** instead of just a "morning talk" — and make sure you join in yourself, sharing your own responses to books you have enjoyed. This is one of the best ways to motivate reading. We do it with each other — why not with children?
- **Celebrate Children's Book Week** in July each year. The Children's Book Council of Australia publishes its Short List of finalists for the Book of the Year and Picture Book of the Year awards a few months in advance. Your librarian should have this information. Have your students read these books and do their *own* judging (or voting) in advance — and compare results.
- Borrow **author/illustrator charts** (Macmillan) to display in your classroom.
- Have children **write to authors/illustrators,** care of publishers. Librarians can supply addresses.
- **Invite authors/illustrators** to your school/classroom, in co-operation with the library. (Offer a fee — they have to live too.)
- Borrow library materials to mount **literature displays** in your classroom, hallways, corridors, display cases, canteens etc. See PEN 51, *Better Displays,* for ideas and techniques.
- Create large **board games** based on plots of particular books. "Quest" fantasies are particularly suited to snakes-and-ladders-type games. These make ideal "rainy-day" activities. Place in library for whole school to use.
- Have children make up alternative **choose your own adventure** versions of well-known books.
- Get children to make up an extensive list of **Trivial Pursuit** questions based on characters, plots, settings, authors, illustrators of children's books.
- When planning **thematic approaches** to curriculum topics, ask the librarian to suggest appropriate fiction, picture-book and poetry book titles to enrich such studies.
- Use children's literature extensively in **Personal Development** programs. Many modern books (picture books included) deal with a range of personal problems (family break-up, death, personal handicaps) and can be used to objectify subjective issues. Your librarian should be able to suggest appropriate materials.
- Encourage children to **buy their own books** and build their own personal libraries. Apart from book shops, a good and inexpensive way to start is through fetes and Opportunity Shops, where good books may be bought cheaply. Book clubs such as Ashton Scholastic and Book Fair offer good value for money. (The teacher who *knows* children's literature through *reading* it can advise individual children about their selections.) Your librarian might co-ordinate this activity for the school.
- Get children to join the **Puffin Club.** This not only focuses their attention on reading of good books, and provides much background information on books, authors and illustrators, but offers a publishing outlet for children's *own* creative writing. Your school librarian might co-ordinate this activity for you also.
- Your library might have **videotapes of filmed versions of children's books** — or sound or sound-slide versions (e.g. Western Woods). Borrow these and use in classrooms for motivating reading.
- Your class might like to make its **own** A/V version of a children's story and add it to the library's resources.
- Invite a **storyteller** to your school, record (with permission) the performance and add to library's resources. These stories may be in languages other than English. Such activities are part of sound community involvement.

Classroom libraries

Alternatives for small schools

Teachers in small schools which do not have a central library may need to establish their own *classroom libraries.* This can be done by:

☐creating a special corner in the classroom or nearby corridor with acoustic screens, shelving, a square of carpet, comfortable seating (such as cushions) for quiet reading and a table and chairs
☐encouraging the children to use the corner for quiet reading and storytelling
☐keeping an attractive selection of books and other materials for children to use and borrow
☐from time-to-time preparing a short talk on new books
☐using bright storage bins and boxes to keep resources in particular categories
☐bulk borrowing from the local public library
☐exchanging/sharing resources on specific topics with other schools
☐adding new, relevant material to encourage reading, e.g. videotapes of stories made into films
☐having the students assist in selecting from a range brought to the school by a bookseller
☐including books written by children in your class
☐establishing files for pictures and magazine and newspaper cuttings
☐recording on cards, or in a book, stories which both you and the children recommend as being "a good read".

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Library/ Research skills

LIBRARY/RESEARCH SKILLS are taught, preferably by librarians and teachers together, to enable children to be confident, independent library users. These skills should be consolidated incidentally (especially when and where needs arise) and practised frequently.

Access to the library in timetabled sessions allows:

- ☐explanation of the use of encyclopaedias and other reference tools when pupils seek a specific entry
- ☐instruction on the nature and use of the catalogue
- ☐examination of the types of materials that are held in special sections of the library, such as the reference section, vertical file, slide collection etc.
- ☐experience in identifying and using different types of print material, such as pamphlets, charts, cuttings
- ☐use of audio-visual equipment with audio-visual software

To get the most out of research projects, observe these rules:

DO talk to the teacher-librarian *beforehand* about the purpose of the activity and what you expect from the students.

DON'T ask for slabs of information to be *copied* mindlessly in the name of "research".

DO examine the resources in the library *yourself*. Make sure there is plenty of material available; if not, suggest alternatives.

DON'T direct children to books alone. Remind them of the many other resources (newspapers, audio-tapes, films etc.)

DO ensure that children have clear, concise aims. Specific research needs specific starting points. Formulate clear questions and encourage children to do the same. *Asking the right question is as important as getting the right answer.* When children formulate their *own* questions their research has more meaning and purpose than when imposed by teachers.

DON'T intimidate poor readers; include activities for *all* students — better still, for individuals.

DO send *small groups* (with specific questions) to the library to carry out research.

DON'T send the entire class to research a single topic. There may not be enough resources for all the students to use.

DO discuss with both the teacher-librarian and the children what has been gained from their research work.

DON'T be over-ambitious as to what can be achieved. A single sentence really understood may be worth more than a mindlessly copied page of "busy work".

Libraries and literature

TO DEVELOP IN CHILDREN A life-long love of books and reading is a major aim of literature-based reading programs. Such programs have best chances of succeeding when *teachers themselves* have a genuine love of books and reading. The only way to acquire this is through reading children's books. Today's books for children are written, illustrated and produced to the highest standards, and can be enjoyed by adults as well as children. As C. S. Lewis said, a book which is enjoyed only by children is probably a bad children's book.

So discover the richness of children's books in your library. To get into the habit of reading them, for pleasure, is one of the most rewarding things a teacher can do — not only for the pleasure such reading gives but for the incalculable carry-over benefits it can have for students. The teacher who reads and enjoys children's literature, and enthusiastically *shares* with and communicates that enjoyment to children, has an enormous influence on the reading attitudes (and abilities) of those children. *A love of literature is* ***caught*** *rather than* ***taught.***

Obviously, a good school library, with an inexhaustible range and supply of first class children's books, at all levels, is a **must** for literature-based reading programs.

As a bonus, a good school librarian, with an intimate knowledge and passionate love of those books, through first-hand reading of them, and training in children's literature, is keen to promote them actively, at every opportunity, through:

- ☐personal recommendations on an informal basis
- ☐book introductions ("shared book experiences") to small groups or whole classes

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Working with your teacher-librarian

- Ask about strategies for getting children "hooked on books".
- Seek **curriculum advice** for general planning or specific concerns.
- Let your teacher-librarian know of forthcoming themes or topics so that resources can be made available when you need them.
- Celebrate **festivals** and special days together. These may include local festivals and celebrations, Easter, Health Week, Christmas, Children's Book Week, agricultural shows, Chinese New Year etc.
- Work together for the preparation and presentation of **displays.** Your students can contribute drawings, toys, photos etc. for a display in the library.
- Arrange for a **demonstration** of audio-visual equipment if you and your students are uncertain about how it is operated.
- Ask about the endless ideas for special **themes** that can enliven classroom activities.
- Contribute to the building of resources in your library by discussing your needs and suggesting specific topics or titles for purchase.
- A special place in the library can house "published" books written by students. These are often among the most popular books in the library. Your librarian might also organise the binding of such books.
- Following an excursion, your class can prepare a book with photographs and comments for presentation to the library — or the archives!
- Assemble class project sheets to make a concertina booklet for housing in the library as a resource.

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Library scheduling

WHEN YOUR CLASS HAS A regularly scheduled library period, or even when it is using the library incidentally, do not regard this as "time off" — for correction, programming or whatever, elsewhere. On the contrary, **become involved.** Plan to *use* the time; seize the chance to show children that the library is *important* to you, and that you are interested in what your students do there. They will appreciate it.

Sessions in the library may be **timetabled** on a **fixed** or **flexible** basis. Flexible timetabling implies a co-operatively planned approach to using library resources. This ensures that the library is an extension of classroom teaching and learning.

In co-operatively planned library sessions, students can:

- ☐learn and apply research skills
- ☐discover and use the library's many different types of resources (e.g. reference, non-fiction, pamphlets, pictures, audio-visual)
- ☐have regular introduction to and enjoyment of a wide range of children's literature
- ☐become familiar with correct library procedures, including borrowing and returning resources
- ☐become competent users of audio-visual equipment
- ☐learn how to produce audio-visual aids for the presentation of reports

While in the library with your students, take the opportunity to:

- ☐investigate their special interests
- ☐discuss their book choices
- ☐offer suggestions for wider reading
- ☐assist by incidentally reinforcing children's research skills at point of need
- ☐browse/select resources for your own needs and programs
- ☐gain an awareness of your student's growth in library and research skills; carry these over into the classroom
- ☐get to know the collection, itself, better
- ☐set an example by reading a book — just for fun!
- ☐do some research of your own

Encourage your pupils to use the library at times other than regularly timetabled periods. They will usually enjoy being asked to:

- ☐gather or return resources for you
- ☐select resources as part of a bulk loan for you and the class
- ☐participate as helpful monitors in the resource centre
- ☐undertake genuine research tasks, especially where they perceive the need to locate information
- ☐return and borrow personal loans
- ☐contribute class or individual displays of art/craft work, creative writing, research projects etc. (i.e. "publishing") to library displays and/or resources
- ☐sit and read (watch/listen to AV media) just for recreation